

The Place of Islam and Human in Nurettin Topçu's Education Perspective

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Abstract

The subjects of this work consist of the books written by Nurettin Topçu, especially the one named *İslam ve İnsan* (Islam and Human), as well as the works of other researchers on this topic. Document investigation method, which is a qualitative research method, was used in the collection of the data. Content analysis method was used in the analysis of collected data. The study included information on whether the books selected for this research deal with Nurettin Topçu's world of thought or his philosophical thoughts. Each book was analyzed individually by the researchers and suitable codes were used in the classification of the books on their philosophical dimensions. The results of the content analysis revealed that the works of Nurettin Topçu act as a bridge between the traditional construct and the modern one. While his frustration with ethics is emphasized in these works, this is not static, but rather dynamic activism and rebellion; he clearly states that syllabi should include the essentials of topics such as religion, history, nation, and ethics.

Keywords: nurettin topçu, education, islam and human

1. Introduction

Generally, education can be defined as the process of changing an individual's behavior. In a broader context, it can be defined as the many social processes that affect one's learning of the public's social standards, beliefs, and ways of life (Demirel et al., 2007). Philosophy is a concept that is written as "filosophia" in Greek. "Filos" stands for love, whereas "sophia" describes wisdom. When they are handled together it means the love of wisdom (Akarsu, 1979). Educational philosophy can be described as the type of philosophy which deals with education in a general context with a philosophical attitude or methods, or even an applied type of philosophy. It can be expressed as the discipline of philosophy that asks, "what is education?", exploring and resolving these definitions beyond the basic concepts and activities that define education. Educational philosophy, which analyzes decisions about the concepts specific to the field of education as well as the structure of the arguments mentioned here, deals with the aim of education while focusing on the principal factors that define it (Cevizci, 2011). There are four major types of Western educational philosophy: perennialism, essentialism, progressivism, and reconstructionism. Perennialism is inspired by realism, whereas essentialism is inspired by idealism and realism. On the other hand, progressivism and reconstructionism are both marked by pragmatism. Reconstructionism is sometimes related to existentialism (Demirel, 2015).

Perennialism: There is classical realism in the basis of perennialism. Many idealists support this idea. According to this approach, education should be formed in accordance with international qualifications. With respect to this value, the nature and ethos of humans is equal everywhere and human beings should be educated due to these never-changing qualifications (Arslanoğlu, 2012).

Essentialism: According to this opinion, all people are expected to possess the same essentials. People who have these principles are accepted as educated. This philosophy is teacher oriented because the teacher serves as the representative of cultural heritage for their students. Essentialism is based in both realism and idealism (Sonmez, 2015)., **Progressivism:** Progression is a core training of pragmatic philosophy. Pragmatic philosophy sees change as the essence of truth. For this reason, this viewpoint suggests that education is in constant development, and that the teacher is just a guide. In other words, education in this philosophy is student centered (Öztürk, 1998).

Reconstructionism: This educational movement is a continuation of progression, and one of the latest developments in the field of educational philosophy. It aims to rebuild culture against developing technology. This approach defines education as the main determiner of social development and advancements in a society. More precisely, education will have a strong impact in reorganizing the society (Topses, 1982).

The perception of Islam in education differs from these philosophies because Western educational disciplines are trying to understand the pupil in terms of his/her behavior. Thus, defining the rules of education accordingly, is it possible to define a human just by using their behavior? The famous thinker Mevlâna (Rumi) tells that the qualities that are described by other human beings are not the fundamental qualities of the human beings (Mevlâna, 1974). Meanwhile, God says "It was We, who created man, and We, know what suggestions his soul makes to him: for We are nearer to him than (his) jugular vein" (Qaf/16). The word "Rab," taken from the attributes of God, means training and educating (Yazır, 1966). This word is the most repeated word after the

name of God in the Qur'an, and it is mentioned over 965 times (Ayasbeyoğlu, 1968). As the word "Rab" occurs in the first verses—including in the first sura, as well as many other places—one can understand the importance of education in the presence of God (Ayhan, 1986).

In general, education and philosophy are complementary concepts. In other words, in today's circumstances it is impossible to answer the questions of which kinds of people are desirable to raise and how they are going to be educated without philosophy. Consequently, it is inappropriate and ineffective to design educational activities without a philosophical basis, especially given our current global context. Thus, we try to understand the educational philosophy of Nurettin Topçu, a philosopher who is capable of integrating Western and Eastern culture.

2. The World of Thought

Topçu lived in a time when the main intellectual movements—namely Westernism, Ottomanism, Islamism, and Nationalism—were being supported by intellectuals for saving the Ottoman Empire during its collapse. He appeared to be close to Nationalism, but in actuality he was a part of the Anatolian movement, which incorporates religion and culture into the concept of homeland (Öztürk&Çetin, 2016). He used to be an Islamist but worked against Political Islam, nationalist but an Anti-Turan, and had a conservative but also victorious personality. His expressions in a letter to Orhan Okay clearly demonstrate his originality: "You see how religion and nationality are embraced by a sense of compassion. As you see the truth is unique in the universe. A nationalist without religion is a vulgar and a religionist away from nation is an imposter. Just like the Turanists, the Islamists of today suffer the same misery. None of them knows God. Can faith be in the one whom are not dealing with the misery of the children of the nation with the mercy of the whole soul?" (Okay, 2015; Akt.Yıldırım, 2016).

Topçu was a man of thought who helped contribute to the evolving concept of Turkish Nationalism. With the move to a unified national government from the multi-cultural structure of Ottoman culture, a new ideology was created, but unfortunately a cultural gap also emerged. The Turkish society, which came from an imperial tradition, had been hesitating about the concept of the nation for a long time. The concept of "Nationalism," with its basis in the French Revolution, was adopted by Westernist Turkish intellectuals and inspired a very important approach both before and during the settlement of the republic, in spite of its destructive effects on the Ottoman Empire's politics (Çağan, 2016). According to Topçu, "Nationalism is history and land consciousness with the shortest expression." The consciousness in history is equal to the consciousness of being a nation. Each member of the nation is a representative of that nation's history, and only in societies who are conjoined with a consciousness of history can this consciousness be developed. "The history of a nation constitutes a mood for the entire nation in centuries by trespassing the moods of the former generations to the following in fifty to sixty years. The nation is a community kneaded by the phenomenon in history" (Topçu, 2011).

According to Topçu, those individuals who hold the belief that the consciousness of history is equal to the consciousness of being a nation are the ones who can best develop society. In this mindset, communities without targets for progress are viewed as nothing more than mobs, and only the ones who can bring their plans for idealistic progression to completion can behave like a nation.

"In fact, the person living in a society is in the equal age of the community in terms of the development of thoughts. A child of Anatolia is 900 years old in thought even though s/he is actually 30 or 40." Only individuals who leave their personal choices behind and conjoin with the consciousness of history can provide social dynamism and spur movements for positive change (Topçu, 1970).

Topçu was a man of thought who had analyzed the West and the East well. He was the man who brought a third perspective to the politically and militarily defined relationship between these two. Moving away from the idea of consciousness in both culture and history, Topçu aimed to assert a philosophical approach on Turkish thought. According to his work, people can only actualize their ideals through action and dynamism. Again he claims that the souls of nations can be searched through their histories (Topçu, 2011). He didn't support the lassitude that originated from Eastern thoughts, and instead tried to bring Western dynamism to Turkish society after finishing his doctorate. He supported a system which engaged positivism by refusing to sacrifice spiritualism. For him, existing meant thinking and moving (Topçu, 2011).

3. Culture and Civilization Concepts

Topçu evaluated the concepts of culture and civilization by making commentary on their evolution within the Turkish society. The persistent admiration of the West, especially during and after the Reforms (Tanzimat), was one of his major topics of criticism. According to Topçu, culture is the sum of the values that a society makes in its history (Topçu, 1972). Civilization is the sum of the technical artifacts and ways of life in a society during a specific period of time (Topçu, 1972). Consequently, according to Topçu, "Our mission is to save the children of Anatolia from the admiration of West and lead them to the newly shining sun" (Topçu, 2011). Accepting religion as a main component of the national culture, Topçu evaluates the technical developments in the West and

Turkish culture together. Whereas our thoughts are shaped partly from philosophy, instead religion takes its place in Topçu's model. He saw Yunus, Mehmet Akif, and Dede Efendi as preservers of national culture, and they are accepted as the preventers of the spread of Western materialism. The West gave up scholastic Christianity and accepted positivism and pragmatism, thus gaining a dynamism. Just like the West, the East should give up conservatism and lassitude; but they are asked not to give up their humanitarian, civilized, and cultural values while doing so. "Culture is voyaging to the eternity. Its criticizing and investigating nature will not extinguish the religion but give it to its original direction" (Topçu, 2011). He stated that the West is developed in science but had some moral problems in its developments. Turkish society must sustain these moral issues and recognize that "The culture is a synthesis of science, ethics and art in a specific community depicts a transcendental composition. By conjoining the information and beliefs, they constitute the culture of a nation and the yeast of culture is transcendental." The leader of a movement should first give him/herself up to his/her owner (to God) (Topçu, 2011).

4. Islam and The View of Humanity

Modern anthropology defines man as a two-legged steep-walker and thinker. This definition expresses its misery creeping on the ground and ambitions attacking around, as well as the greatness that extends to God (Topçu, 2011). According to Topçu's philosophy, the meaning of life should be derived from bringing man out from a small and miserable inner world to a thinking entity approaching God (Topçu, 2011). No matter how well intended an individual's big dreams may be, if they are focused on temporary secular benefits, that person cannot be a friend of God even though s/he constantly worships (Topçu, 2011).

Bacon says that knowing is ruling. However, it is important to note that any information that doesn't lead the individual to thinking is just a null desire. If the knowledge in our brains is useless, it stays being a burden (Topçu, 2011). Intelligence is not a warehouse but a running machine; and information is the raw material that it runs on. The brain processes information and turns it into a thought, just as raw materials are turned into a product. Thinking is not remembering, it is putting forth (Topçu, 2011).

The individual cannot even step into a religious life unless s/he keeps him/herself from hatred, brute force, and arrogance (Topçu, 2011). It is impossible to live the real dimensions of religion. In our mortal world, what pushes people to reach for immortality? Is it feelings? Is it the mind? Is it inspiration?

The mind is not self-sufficient either. It only brings humanity to the animal face of a being living just with emotions (Topçu, 2011). Inspiration is upon the mind, as stated by Gazali and Pascal. It comes from eternity and aggrandizes the mind. In Pascal's words, "there are such reasons that the heart put forth that the mind never knows" (Topçu, 2011). Here, the mind designates thinking without inspiration. Inspiration is the basis of our minds and the real source of humanitarian feelings to the universe.

The way to victory in Islam is a combination of science and ethics, in addition to the heart that moves in front of them (Topçu, 2011). Ethics are the essence of Islam. As Muslims, we should preserve Islamic moral values and live accordingly. A cursory search of the Qur'an will reveal that, alongside mind and wisdom, the most effective and essential quality in the faith is Islamic morality.

Compassion is the divine substance that is the witness of our humanity in the realm and brings us closer to God through the heart. Non-human beings do not have mercy (Topçu, 2011). Every religion has its own affiliation and surrender to divine will. The aim of each of these is the glorification of the intended human spirit: it's called morality. All of the Semai religions have tried to glorify the morals of the people (Topçu, 2011).

In the Islamic world, a ceremonial chain, shining with secular ambitions and desires, has been glorified, and it is deemed to be in favor of Islam. The reign of the world, which is supposed to be a tool for gaining eternal happiness, has been replaced with this secular aim (Topçu, 2011). Thus, religious institutions have been separated from the soul of the religion. They have turned into institutions dressed in religious favors and they are decorated with religious rules (Topçu, 2011).

Another reason for why Islamic thought has lost its function is the spreading of Meşşai philosophy, which is resigned to Aristotelians. In other words, the thoughts of judicial philosophy have been chained to the world of scientific authority (Topçu, 2011).

These scholastic thoughts began gnawing at Islam in the 10th and 11th centuries, with the works of Farabi and İbn Sina. These thinkers became the first representatives of Aristotelian philosophy and benchmarking as the only source of obtaining the truth. They neglected any thought opposing Aristotle's teachings, and altered the Qur'an due to these teachings. They converted any opposing parts in the book of God to Aristotle's teachings (Topçu, 2011).

Living a religious life does not involve living out of our time and society. The aim of religion shouldn't be searched for in outer parts of extinction. The only aim of religion is to reach the human being how to achieve happiness. Otherwise, neither making neat and sonorous sounds nor decorating the values of morals with superstitions and stories should be accepted as a religious duty. Neither do lamenting people in the order of the praise words on behalf of reverence, nor self-transcendent, harmonious discourses have anything to do with

religion and sincerity in the religious soul (Topçu, 2011).

Who is called the man of religion? Being a man of religion doesn't necessarily mean that the person is religious. Instead, they take a position in society's religious lives (Topçu, 2011). Humanity is looking for a savior for the wrecked souls. A person who is praying for money cannot take others to God's presence. How accurate is it to call such a community "Muslims" when their souls are filled with corruption and benefit, envy and profit? (Topçu, 2011). The man of religion is the person who is moral and exemplary to the people. They are the ones who have forgotten their desires and blocked out the interests of the world. They love the creator and his creations and with both heart and mind, and run to help for the sake of all the faith's servants. They know that mysticism is the gateway to human truths. They are Sufis who understand the Qur'an and live it, in order to be a real (moral) human being.

The awakening age of Islam will be one of mysticism: the power that lives by solving the secret of turning to be a man from goods and materials, in a time when machines ruin the soul of humankind (Topçu, 2011). Those who exploit the power of the Islamic society are raising falsehood in full mobilization, and they are trying to sate their unsatisfied ambitions and interests with an excess of appetite. The awakening age of Islam will start by ending this period and reaching the morals and beliefs of the Prophet's era; the resulting mysticism will help bring the world's science and philosophy to their pinnacle (Topçu, 2011).

Love is the sense that introduces God to us. It is impossible to understand the God and the Prophet without love, and it is unthinkable to live like a human without it. Even though the faith's rules and provisions are derived from the source of love, trying to live Islam without the love of God takes the individual to bigotry (Topçu, 2011).

Topçu puts Islamic belief at the center of the world. According to him, the concepts of God and Prophet are in favor of the happiness of humankind. Islam and the Prophet are excellent. The ideal humankind, for which humanity has searched for centuries, can be found in Islam (Topçu, 2011). Special attention to science and contemplation have turned Islam into a perfect religion. Topçu, who claims that he found the essence of existentialism in Islam, became an ardent defender of the "virtuous man" theory. "When I say 'I am a human,' the 'I' stands for the existence and 'human' stands for the gist. Only if the gist is complete when it is attached to God and these are inseparable." As he drew closer to the concept of "Vahdet-iVücut (Wicked Body) ," Topçu united the concepts of Islam and humanity. "Islam is the religion of mercy and love and exalted humanity as it is constituted as the most honorable and valuable creation in genesis. Of course this value can be actualized by living the core of Islam literally" (Topçu, 2016).

For Topçu, having morality involves living like a human. He puts forward the theological essence and believes that the gist of humanity is created with a specific aim. He focused on answering questions such as, "what is truth?," "is the world a dream?," and "what does existence stand for?," stating that the answers to all of these are hidden in religious mysticism and history. "Speech is the source of all information at the same time. In fact it is the real enlightenment source for all man in the world" (Topçu, 2016). He argued that most of the answers to questions posed by thinkers like Plato are in Islam; specifically, he asserted that man, as the caliph of God on the world, can only find complete satisfaction of his curiosity in the peace and contemplation of Islam.

Likewise, he stated that the solution to the desperate quests of the Existentialist philosophy is hidden in the understanding of wisdom in Islam. He believes that the reality of objects and the value of humanity are hidden in Turkish mysticism, stating that the balance between the world and hereafter are bound to the prayers and diligence to be made in accordance with Islamic beliefs. According to Islam, people who think and work are valuable. The swelter of mental and bodily attempts are seen equal. "To really exist, one should have to choose his/her own existence. An individual's understanding of self reveals its value. Man with a talent to understand everything in the present can find truth through thought and following the rights. He is the "Eşref-imahluk (the greatest of the created) ." Only if he understands his owner and the fact of creation can he find the truth. "Man is a combination of body and soul. The existence of man is his presence in the world. We're here in the world with our bodies. My body is the condition of my consciousness" (Topçu, 2016). He states the notion of existence, which he claims that Western philosophers are stuck in, is hidden in Islamic dialectic, in addition to the answers to many other secrecies. Thus, he supported the notion that the contemplative vision of Islam enables the human to understand himself. "The one who knows himself, knows the creator" is the best answer to philosophical dialectics. Movement is the combination of human and the God. Neither God, nor the human can only create it nor destroy. The God that a word of it is efficient to do anything has no remedy for that" (Topçu, 2016). Topçu states that the way to get closer to the God is suffering, and that God can only be understood by obedience. For this thought and movement to have a meaning, Topçu asks the individual not to surrender to secularism, and instead to give up his/her worldly desires.

He argued that the issue of human motion should be considered as a "right," believing the thesis of "if you believe, you are right." Therefore, he asserts this remedy to the public as a receipt of survival by pointing out that "desire and frustration are temporary surprises. Hope is the condition of life. Souls can only survive by the existence of hope and it is just like the fabric that our souls are made of" (Topçu, 2011). He argued that the

development of the Turkish-Muslim society can only be possible by its own sense of value. To do so, good education, in addition to moral society and a dynamic way of administration, are depicted as prerequisites for this development, as well as the assignment of jobs to efficient people.

5. Conclusion

Topçu, who earned his doctorate under the tutelage of the famous French thinker and founder of action philosophy, Maurice Blondel at Sorbonne University, was clearly influenced by his teacher's view that society can only survive by sticking to the moral and spiritual values against materialistic-positivist approaches. In fact, Ottoman society spent 150 years reaching towards westernization, and during this time it existed in such a duality that it was seesaw between two opinions. Materialism or spirituality? Collective ethics or personal interest? Missioner schools became widespread and effective after the revolutions in Ottoman society, and the admiration of the West surrendered them. Military defeats left the Ottoman state helpless against the West. For centuries the state was defined as "Devlet-i Aliye (the great state)," and when it started to lose against the West, the solution to this situation was initially seen as military revolutions and the opening of embassies in the West to have closer relations with western nations. However, the West wasn't sincere to the Ottomans: they saw the region as an open market and started to exploit it both economically and morally.

Topçu blames Madrasahs and the Ottoman education system for being underdeveloped, criticizing both the materialist and Machiavellian sides of the Western education system. He asks that the concepts of religion, history, and nation should instead be adopted as a basis for education. He thought that if the ideas of land and homeland were surrounded by ethical values, highly developed societies would experience greater progress in both material production and moral values. "Humanity will not remain without worship as long as it is not destroyed, as the soul cannot be dead unless it dies" (Topçu, 2011). He supported the idea that Turkish nationalism should be embedded in syllabi, stating that moral values can be developed through patriotism. According to this philosophy, education must be built on the "Human-Nation-God" concepts, in order to support the primary educational aim of education of developing dynamic, hardworking, individuals with strong national cultural values and patriotism. Topçu says "There are no schools of Mevlana, Yunus or Sinan. Even there is no school of Qur'an. Poor crowd continuously caught the sickness of memorizing the words of the Big Book and conveying them, and the real meaning of Qur'an is lying under the curtains for centuries because of this madness" (Topçu, 2011). By doing so, he criticizes the communities that are only focusing on the Qur'an. Thus he advises us to consider it as a guide for all of our lives and open new windows to our souls while sheltering monotonous, systemized wisdom. He also adds that from salesman to politicians, doctors to journalists, children to elderly, we need a book that opens gates to different worlds, and that this should be the basis of our educational system by conjoining the needs of the age, namely freedom, wisdom, and realities. This book is the Qur'an. By doing so, Topçu emphasized the importance of the Qur'an in education (Topçu, 2011).

He also undertakes many tasks to universities. "The first stage of feeling and will union that we call national union is uniting in the heart and beliefs and this should be constituted in the university". He criticizes the existence of politics in the campus and also carps the books that the lecturers write as being faulty and leading the pupils to memorize. Topçu asks the university to become a castle and a development center for the national education ideal by being free, national, dynamic and evoking social consciousness, and he states that the society can be developed by education (Topçu, 2011).

Nurettin Topçu is a very important theorist in Turkish thought. He acted as a bridge between the traditional and modern approaches to educational philosophy. Although he expressed moral concerns, he was not a conservative. He respected all of the religions and he considered the feeling of believing as a driving force of the dynamic center for mentality, thought, and soul. In fact, labeling Topçu as a mere insubordinate of Turkish society is a weak assertion, as he was one of the leading characters supporting the East against the West. He asked Eastern societies, who were underdeveloped as a consequence of ignoring mind and thought, to act. He supported the idea that without contemplation there cannot be progress, and civilization cannot be constituted unless soul and body are united. In actuality, at some times in history the East was dominant over the West; however, it couldn't adjust its institutions according to the ever-changing conditions of the age, and as a result it is underdeveloped. The system of education could be changed, but as the Ottoman Empire started the dispersion process it could not innovate while also struggling to maintain its independence. As Kemal Tahir said, there was a betrayal of Westernization in the first years of the Ottoman Republic. The people who were said to be intellectual were also separated from the cultural values of their people.

Turkish society has built and governed enormous states in the past. One of the basic features of these states is fairness. Unfortunately, these states didn't cope with these changes and enlightenment due to many reasons. Further studies can be conducted on whether Nurettin Topçu had touched on the sociology and the philosophy of this broader context.

Consequently, Turkish society should understand, interpret, and live Nurettin Topçu's teachings while entering the 21st century. Social sciences can only find the deserved value and lead a revolution of change by

only understanding geniuses like Topçu.

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